



— State of —
North Dakota
Office of the Governor
John Hoeven
Governor

October 31, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Through:

Mr. David Maurstad, Regional Director
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Region VIII
Department of Homeland Security
Denver Federal Center, Building 710
PO Box 25267
Denver, CO 80225-0267

Dear Mr. President:

Under the provisions of Section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5206 (Stafford Act), and implemented by 44 CFR § 206.36, and in accordance with CFR § 206.227, I request that you declare a major disaster for the State of North Dakota as a result of a severe winter storm/snowfall, accompanied by record-breaking snowfall, rain and high winds, that occurred on October 4-6, 2005.

As I sign this letter requesting your assistance, we have experienced continued repercussions from this storm activity that caused extensive damages to infrastructure, resulted in prolonged power outages and stranded hundreds of travelers and residents, requiring sheltering operations throughout the state. While North Dakotans are accustomed to winter storm emergencies, the intensity of this storm required extraordinary measures to save lives and then to recover from its wide-ranging impacts. The storm broke records for both its occurrence so early in the season and for its massive amounts of snowfall that isolated many rural residents, closed several transportation routes and decimated several infrastructure concerns to include power lines, telephone lines and communication equipment, whereby impeding emergency response aid and recovery. The impact of this winter storm stretched from the southwest, throughout the entire mid section, and to the northeast corner of the state. Areas most severely impacted include the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, Benson, Billings, Bottineau, Bowman, Burke, Dunn, Golden Valley, McHenry, McKenzie, McLean, Mercer, Oliver, Pierce, Renville, Rolette, Sheridan, Stark, Towner and Ward counties.

Additionally, eleven counties meet the criteria established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) “for near record snowfall” and should be eligible for assistance with FEMA’s snow policy (9523.1). Those counties include Billings, Bowman, Burke, Dunn, Golden Valley, McKenzie, Morton, Mountrail, Stark, Ward and Williams, as outlined in Attachment C. Nine

October 31, 2005

additional counties meet the criteria of the snow policy for record or near record snow removal; however, because the National Weather Service (NWS) is still gathering snowfall of record and the fact that FEMA requires the official record by NWS, we are unable to submit the additional counties in this request. Those counties include Bottineau, Divide, Grant, Hettinger, Mercer, Pierce, Renville, Rolette and Slope. I, therefore, reserve the right to add these counties to the declaration for snow clearance, in the event they meet the criteria of the snow policy for emergency snow removal.

In response to the situation, I have taken appropriate action under State law and issued a snow emergency declaration on October 6, directing execution of the State Emergency Operations Plan (SEOP), in accordance with Section 401 of the Stafford Act. The declaration was upgraded to a statewide disaster declaration on October 31, 2005, based on increasing damages, as well as initial and preliminary damage assessment results. In compliance with federal requirements and the state's goal of providing effective mitigation measures, the State of North Dakota Standard Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan was approved March 9, 2005.

On October 18, 2005, I directed the N.D. Division of Homeland Security, Department of Emergency Services, to request a joint federal, state, tribal and local survey of the damaged areas. The Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) took place October 19-26, 2005. The PDA indicated that the most severe impacts were to 13 uninsured Rural Electric Cooperatives (RECs) and transportation infrastructure. Direct damages and losses occurred to both public infrastructure and private property, and required response expenses for emergency protective measures and debris clearance.

Based on the findings of the PDA, I have determined that this incident is of such severity and magnitude that effective response and recovery is beyond the capabilities of the state and the affected local and tribal governments and that supplementary Federal assistance is necessary. Therefore, I am specifically requesting implementation of the Public Assistance Program for the aforementioned tribal land and counties. Additionally, I request statewide implementation of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, to include all North Dakota counties and tribal reservations. I further request that North Dakota be designated as a Public Assistance Managing State for this disaster. Preliminary estimates of the types and amount of public assistance needed under the Stafford Act are tabulated in Enclosure A.

An analysis by the Chief Meteorologist-in-Charge, Bismarck Office of the National Weather Service, indicated that the October 4-6, 2005, storm was the earliest significant snowstorm on record for North Dakota. The weekend before the storm occurred, when the NWS began issuing storm statements and warnings, conditions were hot and sunny. Those conditions quickly changed during the early morning hours of October 4, 2005 when the storm moved into the state from the southwest, moved across the central portion and exited in the northeast. The storm produced a band of snowfall amounts in excess of 18 to 20 inches that stretched from the far southwestern town of Bowman, northwest to Dickinson and then north central to Minot. The NWS is currently assessing snow of record levels; initial findings indicate these levels will be surpassed by the October 4-6 storm activity. In addition to heavy snow, high winds that gusted up to 50 miles per hour (mph), creating blizzard-like conditions persisted into the early hours of October 6 for the northeastern portion of the state.

The Chief-Meteorologist-in-Charge reported that in North Dakota it is unusual to have such heavy wet snow so early in the season when trees are still covered with leaves. Historically, such snow events occur toward the end of October. This historic storm activity resulted in an

unprecedented amount of tree damage that severely impacted travel, traffic, structures and utilities. The storm followed a pattern that impacted larger, more densely populated areas to include Minot and Dickinson where, of course, more trees, structures and power lines are located.

The State Operations Center (SOC), activated on October 4, 2005, began receiving notifications from emergency managers in the impacted areas that they activated their Emergency Operations Centers and Emergency Operations Plan. The SOC was staffed by representatives from my staff as well as the North Dakota Department of Transportation, the North Dakota Highway Patrol, the North Dakota National Guard and the North Dakota Department of Emergency Services. These agencies worked collectively to assist local and tribal governments with search and rescue efforts and to assess snow removal and damage to infrastructure. As the storm moved into the state, the N.D. Highway Patrol closed the interstate and other state routes as the Department of Transportation pulled crews from the road until conditions improved. Local, tribal and state law enforcement, accompanied by snow plows and additional support vehicles, ventured onto snow-clogged roads to rescue hundreds of motorists. As part of these efforts, the N.D. Highway Patrol, the N.D. National Guard and the N.D. Department of Transportation mobilized snow removal equipment and personnel to assist with search and rescue operations. The Highway Patrol mobilized two 57-passenger buses, and the National Guard sent a 44-passenger bus, one 20-ton tractor trailer with a dozer, two HEMMT fuelers and a five ton wrecker.

Power outages that resulted from the storm required emergency communications centers and hospitals to operate on generator power. Some hospitals resorted to snowmobiles as a means of transporting staff to work. While classes were dismissed early, school buses, in some instances, transported students to shelters. Storm conditions knocked radio towers out of service, disrupting emergency communications by public safety officials. When service was disrupted in the north central county of Rolette, operations were transferred to State Radio Communications in Bismarck, where dispatchers handled hundreds of calls from citizens reporting power outages, stranded motorists, overdue travelers and other inquiries.

Shelters opened throughout the state to accommodate residents without power and heat or travelers stranded by storm conditions. Search and rescue efforts were initiated throughout the region, including one effort to locate a missing rural electric cooperative crew member who was located several hours later at a farmstead where he sought shelter. The National Guard launched Oh-58 and UH 60 helicopter crews to assist with the effort.

On local and tribal levels, officials have issued emergency declarations and monitored forecasts as they formulated response efforts. Local and tribal emergency managers activated their Emergency Operations Centers in support of response efforts. Highway departments and public works crews marked roads, removed snow and debris and assisted with rescue efforts. Law enforcement provided direction and coordination to stranded motorists. Local officials set up call centers for individuals to report damages and distributed cleanup information. Additionally, rural electric cooperatives and private utility companies repaired their infrastructure.

As conditions abated and cleanup efforts began, I sent National Guard troops, equipped with chain saws, front end loaders and other heavy equipment, to Dickinson to clear right of ways for emergency vehicles. The N.D. Department of Transportation diverted resources from the eastern part of the state to assist local and tribal public works crews in disaster-impacted areas. Staff from our State Electrical Board assisted with power companies and electrical contractors to assess damage. Throughout the area, REC crews worked diligently to restore power to residents, some of whom were without power for several days.

In response to community needs, members of the North Dakota Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster provided assistance during the storm. The Mid-Dakota Chapter of the American Red Cross in Minot sheltered families at local hotels and opened a shelter at the Minot City Auditorium. Three Affiliated Tribe ranchers assisted with snow removal efforts. Volunteers in Golden Valley prepared and delivered meals to an assisted living facility and helped prepare and feed approximately 30 meals for stranded travelers at a local church. Throughout the impacted regions, families opened their homes to stranded individuals.

On a state level, functional and task coordinators, agencies assigned responsibilities in the SEOP, have been active in their efforts to support local and tribal governments as follows:

Governor's Office – We have continually monitored conditions and have assisted with coordination of resources and dissemination of critical information.

Division of Homeland Security, Department of Emergency Services – The Division coordinated notification and activation of state agency response to the record breaking winter storm areas as needs for state assistance arose and assisted local and tribal governments in conducting damage assessments, compiled damage assessment information, researched available disaster relief programs and assisted in the coordination. Additionally, staff members have been coordinating the development, preparation and distribution of situation reports and news releases with various state, federal, local and tribal agencies; providing liaison with local, federal and volunteer agencies; providing briefings and preparing documentation for the Governor and state functional and task coordinators.

Division of State Radio, Department of Emergency Services – The Division provided a communications network for receiving and transmitting emergency and warning information among all levels of government and provided support to emergency operations staff. Additionally, the Division assisted with local public safety communications requirements, including alerting ambulance crews, fire departments and law enforcement and other response units, as necessary.

Department of Human Services – Human Service staff members' monitored conditions and acted as a liaison to the voluntary agencies to ensure the needs of citizens were addressed

Electrical Board – The N.D. State Electrical Board worked with local power companies and electrical contractors to identify and replace damaged electrical equipment in private residences and businesses so power could be restored. Staff also issued public service announcements, alerting residents to the dangers of downed, live power lines.

Department of Transportation – The Department of Transportation mobilized snow removal equipment on I-94 from Hebron to the Montana border and on U.S. Highway 83 north of Washburn for stranded motorists. Crews conducted extensive snow removal operations

National Guard – Guard personnel assisted with search and rescue operations by providing soldiers, one 44-passenger bus, one 20-ton tractor trailer with a dozer, two HEMMT fuelers and a five ton wrecker.

Department of Health – Health officials monitored the impacts that the winter storm had on the hospitals, which were required to use generators due to power outages.

October 31, 2005

Highway Patrol – Troopers assisted with the rescue of stranded motorists and provided traffic control during temporary road closures and detours. Additionally, they patrolled threatened areas, assisting stranded motorists.

Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Attorney General's Office – Bureau of Criminal Investigation agents monitored conditions and provided information on the situation.

I certify that for this major disaster, state and local governments will assume all applicable non-federal shares of costs required by the Stafford Act. Total expenditures are expected to exceed \$2,246,575.00, in accordance with the table in Enclosure B.

In addition, I anticipate the need for debris removal, which posed an immediate threat to lives, public health and safety. Pursuant to Sections 403 and 407 of the Stafford Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5170b & 5173, the State agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the United States of America for any claims arising from the removal of debris or wreckage for this disaster. The State agrees that debris removal from public and private property will not occur until the landowner signs an unconditional authorization for the removal of debris.

I have designated Major General Michael J. Haugen, Director of the North Dakota Department of Emergency Services, as the State Coordinating Officer, and Susan Reinertson, Director of the North Dakota Division of Homeland Security, and Lonnie Hoffer, Disaster Recovery and Mitigation Chief of the Division of Homeland Security, as the alternate State Coordinating Officers for this request. They will work with FEMA in damage assessments and may provide further information or justification on my behalf.

Sincerely,
/s/
John Hoeven
Governor

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Enclosures

cc: Senator Byron Dorgan
Senator Kent Conrad
Representative Earl Pomeroy
MG Michael J. Haugen, Adjutant General's Office
Susan Reinertson, N.D. Division of Homeland Security
Lonnie Hoffer, N.D. Division of Homeland Security